DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 931 CG 011 710

AUTHOR Kaplan, Martin; Nagy, Geraldine F.
TITLE Redundancy of Behavioral Information in Dating.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (Chicago, Illinois, May 5-7, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; *Dating (Social); Decision Making; *Females; *Physical Characteristics; *Prediction; *Redundancy; Research Projects; *Social Psychology

ABSTRACT

Women chose between male dates described by (1) a photograph and (2) behavioral descriptions which varied in desirability for dating and redundancy. The effect of physical unattractiveness outweighed that of attractiveness only when the described behavior was redundant. This implies that differential weighting of physical attractiveness (i.e., unattractive greater than attractive) occurs only when other information is weakly predictive of dating desirability. Additionally, subjects who were more selective of dates when provided only a photograph were not more bound by physical appearance when also provided with behavioral information. Instead, compared to less selective subjects, they attended more to behavioral attributes when the prospective date was unattractive. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Redundancy of Behavioral Information in Dating

Martin Kaplan, Northern Illinois University

Geraldine F. Nagy, Kansas State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Martin Kaplan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED143931

The decision to date another may be viewed from a number of perspectives. One means is to consider dating choice as a process of cognitive information integration. The decision-maker has at his/her disposal a number of pieces of information about the date, each possessing some value regarding the dateableness of the prospect. Our first task is to identify the limited number of informational dimensions (e.g., physical appearance, sense of humor, and so on) bearing on the decision, and the dateableness value of each for the particular date. Then, we determine the cognitive rule by which the information is integrated to form the dateableness impression. Strategies such as discounting, importance weighting, and comparing apply here, as do decision-maker characteristics (e.g., selectivity criterion) and information qualities (e.g., redundancy, informativeness, reliability). Since it has been repeatedly shown that physical attractiveness is a prime dimension (Kleck & Rubenstein, 1975; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966), a frequent research strategy is to study the combination of physical and behavioral information.

Several studies suggest that physical and behavioral information are combined according to a differential weighted-averaging rule. That is, the importance of physical attractiveness (PA) varies inversely with the date's level of attractiveness. Behavioral information matters less when dates are unattractive than attractive; to risk a pun, unattractive people carry more weight. This is so whether behavioral information is conveyed by adjective traits (Lampel & Anderson, 1968), attitudes(Miller, 1972), or personal remarks

CG 011 710

about the decision maker (Sigall & Aronson, 1969). It would appear from these studies that what we know of an attractive person is more important than knowing the same things about an unattractive person.

But life is not so simple. The preceding studies did not limit behavioral information to dimensions with demonstrated relevance to dating. When information specifically relevant to dating is provided, the importance of physical attractiveness has been found to be constant, that is, not dependent on PA level (Nagy, 1975). These conflicts may be reconciled if we assume that dating-relevant traits carry greater weight than randomly selected traits. Behavioral information which is not entirely relevant to dating can be discounted in the presence of unattractiveness, whereas it is harder to dismiss such information when it is directly informative of one's dateableness.

This study attempts to clarify the conditions necessary for differential weighting of physical attractiveness. Nagy (1975) suggests that differential weighting will occur only when the other information provided is weakly predictive, one way or the other, of dating desirability. Holding constant the relevance of behavioral information for dating, variations in predictiveness can be induced by varying the redundancy of behavioral information. That is, redundant descriptions of others would be less informative than would nonredundant descriptions. And, according to our reasoning, the former condition should allow more for differential weighting of the date's attractiveness.

This study also examined subject biases. Lampel and Anderson (1968) suggested that differential weighting occurs because of negative sanctions on dating unattractive people. Because of this, other date characteristics will be largely discounted for unattractive others, but will become increasingly important as attractiveness improves. It occurred to us that some people would be particularly selective about dating an unattractive person, and would be

especially likely to discount other information about unattractive dates. In other words, selective subjects would show a more pronounced differential weighting effect.

Method

Procedure

Female subjects were presented with 28 pairs of prospective male dates, each prospect described by (1) a photograph which was (according to norms derived on an independent sample) either attractive or unattractive and (2) three brief behavioral descriptions. The three behavioral descriptions were either low or high in desirability in a date (again, determined from a normative sample) and were either categorically redundant or nonredundant. The former described behaviors from the same informational dimension (considerateness) while the latter described behaviors from three different informational dimensions (consideratiVeness, maturity, interestingness). The described behaviors were all relevant and important to dating as shown by pilot work. Descriptions of specific behavioral instances (e.g., "He's quite willing to accept invitations from others for dinner but never reciprocates") were used instead of the ubiquitous trait adjective stimuli to facilitate manipulation of redundancy, and because our knowledge of others more typically takes the form of their specific acts and intentions.

Choices were constructed by pairing each of eight prospective dates with the remainder, for a total of 28 paired choices. A given prospective date represented one of eight cells in the factorial combination of PA (attractive/unattractive), desirability of behavior (high/low) and redundancy of behavioral description (redundant/nonredundant). Four separate subject replications were run. In the first replication, photos were randomly assigned to each set of descriptions within the 2 x 2 x 2 design. In the remaining replications, photos

were rotated so that over the experiment, each of the 4 attractive (or unattractive) males was associated in turn with each of the 4 types of behavioral descriptions.

For each pairing, subjects indicated preferred date and degree of preference for one over the other, and then listed characteristics (photo or behavioral items) in order of importance for their decision.

Subjects

Eighteen subjects were run in each replication for a total of 72 subjects. Subjects volunteered for the experiment to earn extra points toward the introductory psychology course at Northern Illinois University, with the restriction that they had to be eligible for dating (i.e., not married, engaged, or the like).

Within each replication half of the subjects were "selective" with regards to physical attractiveness while the other half were "nonselective". Selectivity was determined in pretesting by how many of 27 photographed males the subject was willing to date in preference to a similar activity (a movie) with a same-sexed friend. Pretesting was done in a separate session, and used none of the photos used in the experiment.

Results

Number of choices of each date (maximum possible = 7) was tabulated, and an analysis of variance performed. Naturally, main effects for both PA and desirability of behavioral descriptions were obtained ($F(1, 44) = 142.16$ and 78.48, respectively). More important, however, is the significant 3-way interaction between physical attractiveness, behavior, and redundancy, portrayed in Figure 1 ($F(1, 44) = 10.64$). This interaction reflects differential weighting of physical attractiveness only when the behavioral information was redundant. In Figure 1, the divergence to the right of the curves for redundant informa-

tion sets means that behavior made less difference when the date was unattractive than when attractive. Conversely, this implies a larger weight for unattractive visages. The results were reversed, however, when behavioral information was nonredundant, producing divergence to the left. The same pattern of results obtained for the rated preference of prospect over another, but only approached statistical significance ($F(1, 44) = 2.93$, $p < .10$ for the 3-way interaction.

Contrary to expectations, "selective" subjects did not show a stronger tendency than "nonselective" subjects to use a differential weighting rule. Instead, "selectives" used a more complex strategy, as shown by the selectivity x physical attractiveness x behavior interaction ($F(1, 44) = 4.09$) in Figure 2. When the date was unattractive, selective subjects did not discount behavioral information as we had anticipated; rather, they placed increasing weight on the prospect's behavior. This is shown in Figure 2 by the greater distance between the positive and negative behavior curves for selective subjects when the prospect was unattractive than when the prospect was attractive. Put another way, when the prospect was described by negative behavior, selective subjects placed greater weight on the physical attractiveness dimension.

In all, when either PA or desirability of behavior was low, selective subjects were more discriminating toward variations in the remaining information.

Discussion

These data suggest the general conclusion that differential weighting of physical attractivness occurs only when other information about the date is weakly predictive of dating desirability. When information about the prospect does not have a demonstratble relationship to dating, or is predictive but internally redundant, unattractiveness will weigh more in the decision than attractiveness. But, attractiveness and unattractiveness will have equal import when information is relevant and nonredundant. This experiment makes

the point forcefully, in that the presence or absence of differential weighting as a function of informativeness of behavior was shown for the same photos. That is, the absence of differential weighting in any given study could be attributed to the use of less extreme photos (e.g., mildly attractive or unattractive). However, showing behavioral informativeness effects with the same photos rules out the extremity interpretation. We conclude, instead, that behavior of a propsective date can be discounted in the face (no pun intended) of unattractiveness only when the behavior can be sloughed off as uninformative of dating desirability.

These data have some implications for dating behavior. First, in real world settings, decision makers would likely have at their disposal a greater variety of predictive information than we experimenters provide our subjects. Consequently, differential weighting of physical attractiveness would be less likely than would appear to be the case in cited experiments. On a practical note, if an unattractive person wishes to have his/her physical attributes weigh no more than those of his/her attractive rival, it would be best to disclose as varied a number of behavioral attributes relevant to dating as possible.

Second, decision makers who appear to be highly selective in whom they'll date when shown photos only, are not necessarily more bound by the prospect's physical attractiveness. They are more selective in a different way; compared to less selective persons, they will attend more to the prospect's behavior when the prospect is unattractive.

Perhaps the most important point that should be made is that treatment of physical attractiveness in studies of dating requires greater subtlety than evidenced in those studies which try to show simply that attractiveness is more or less important than nonphysical behavior (e.g., Berschied, Dion,

Walster, & Walster, 1971; Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Kleck & Rubenstein, 1975; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971; Walster, et. al., 1966). How important the prospective date's physical appearance is depends on what else you know about him/her, how selective you are, and under limited conditions, how nice (bad) looking he/she is.

References

Berscheid, E., Dion, K., Walster, E., & Walster, G. M. Physical attractiveness and dating choice: A test of the matching hypothesis. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1971, 7, 173-189.

Byrne, D., London, D., & Reeves, D. The effect of physical attractiveness, sex, and attitudinal similarity on interpersonal attraction. Journal of Personality, 1968, 36, 259-271.

Kleck, R. E., & Rubenstein, C. Physical attractiveness, perceived attitude similarity, & interpersonal attraction in an opposite-sex encounter. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1975, 31, 107-114.

Lampel, A. K., & Anderson, N. H. Combining visual and verbal information in an impression formation task. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1968, 9, 1-6.

Miller, A. G. Effect of attitude similarity-dissimilarity on the utilization of additional stimulus inputs in judgments of interpersonal attraction. Psychonomic Science, 1972, 26, 199-203.

Nagy, G. Female dating strategies as a function of physical attractiveness and other social characteristics of males. Unpublished Master's thesis (1975). Cited in Shanteau, J., and Nagy, G. Decisions made about other people: A human judgment analysis of dating choice. In J. Carroll and J. Payne (Eds.), Cognition and Social Judgment. Potomac, Maryland: Lawrence Erlbaum, Associates, 1977.

Sigall, H., & Aronson, E. Liking for an evaluator as a function of her physical attractiveness and nature of the evaluations. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1969, 5, 93-100.

Stroebe, W., Insko, C. A., Thompson, V. D., & Layton, B. D. Effects of physical attractiveness, attitude similarity, and sex on various aspects of interpersonal attraction. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1971, 18, 79-91.

Walster, E., Aronson, V., Abrahams, D., & Rottmann, L. Importance of physical attractiveness in dating behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 508-516.